



United States Department of the Interior

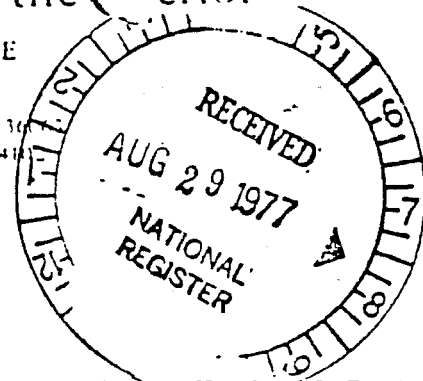
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

WESTERN REGION

450 GOLDEN GATE AVENUE, BOX 36
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94117

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30
(WR)RC



DE
3/15/78

Memorandum

To: Associate Director, Management and Operations, National Park Service
Attention: Cultural Resources Management Division

From: Regional Director, Western Region

Subject: Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places

Enclosed are nominations for 13 properties in this Region which have been processed by the California State Historic Preservation Officer:

Death Valley National Monument
Death Valley Scotty Historic District
Kings Canyon National Park
Shorty Lovelace Historic District
Sequoia National Park
Giant Forest Lodge Historic District, Camp Sierra
Giant Forest Village/Camp Kaweah Historic District
Yosemite National Park
Bridalveil Meadow Historic Site
El Portal Archeological District
Engine No. 6, Hetch Hetchy Railroad
Golden Crown Mine
Great Sierra Wagon Road
Lamon Orchard Historic Site
✓ Old Coulterville Road and Trail
Track Bus No. 19, Hetch Hetchy Railroad
Yosemite Valley Bridges

We are enclosing an extra copy of each for your files.

Enclosures

cc:
Superintendent, Death Valley
Superintendent, Sequoia and Kings Canyon
Superintendent, Yosemite

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Old Coulterville Road and Trail

AND/OR COMMON

Coulterville Road

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

N/A

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Yosemite National Park

VICINITY OF

15th

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

CA

06

Mariposa

043

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT
☐ BUILDING(S)
☒ STRUCTURE
☐ SITE
☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC
☐ PRIVATE
☐ BOTH
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
☐ IN PROCESS
☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☐ OCCUPIED
☒ UNOCCUPIED
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
☒ YES: RESTRICTED
☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED
☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK
☐ EDUCATIONAL ☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
☐ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS
☐ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☒ TRANSPORTATION
☐ MILITARY ☐ OTHER:

4 AGENCY

National Park Service

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS. (If applicable)

Western Regional Office

STREET & NUMBER

450 Golden Gate Ave., Box 36063

CITY, TOWN

STATE

San Francisco

VICINITY OF

CA

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Yosemite National Park/Roads and Trails office

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 577

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Yosemite National Park

CA

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED
☐ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Coulterville Road enters Yosemite National Park four times along the western boundary as it winds along to the terminus at Highway 140 in the Merced River Canyon, one mile below the area known as Cascades. The combined length across National Park land is 8-7/8 miles. Historic documents refer to 19½ miles inside park boundaries; however, approximately 6 of those miles are actually on National Forest land and a 4-mile section to the valley floor proper is no longer extant. (There is also a spur route connecting the Coulterville with the Big Oak Flat route via Crane Flat, a distance of some 6 miles that is shown on topographic maps but not included in this nomination.)

Starting at the park boundary, near Hazel Green, the dirt road passes through a lodgepole forest, with gentle grading and enters the Merced Grove of giant sequoias. This section is designated as a fire road for use of National Park Service vehicles only. The southern entrance to the grove is blocked by a dirt culvert across the road and the northern entrance has a locked fire road gate. Heading east toward Foresta/Big Meadow the road is intersected in several places by paved access roads on Forest Service land. The Coulterville road is paved for the last 3½-mile section, where it crosses Crane Creek on the southern perimeter of Big Meadow to its terminus.

The last 1-3/4 miles of road has a grade of over 16% compared to modern mountain maximum of 6%. The sheer descent required several retaining walls to support the outside edge of the road. They are still intact. The danger of traversing this last section of road is one reason why it failed in competition with the old Big Oak Flat Road. Some cars are driven a short section of this grade from the 140 side to gain access to a rock climbing area on the granite cliff, although there is a sign prohibiting vehicular access.

Historically the road continued up the Merced River Canyon, on the north side to a junction near the present Pohono Bridge where it joined the previously built wagon road leading to the old Yosemite Village. The historic road description closely parallels this current description with the inclusion of the valley access and several sections of Forest Service land near Foresta.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☐ RELIGION
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE
☐ 1500-1599	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE
☐ 1600-1699	☐ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☐ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☒ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER
☒ 1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☒ TRANSPORTATION
☐ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1874

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Coulterville and Yosemite Turnpike

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Coulterville Road is the first stagecoach road to have reached the floor of Yosemite Valley and is of local significance in transportation and engineering. For 23 years prior to its construction the only access to the valley was by horse, mule, or foot down precipitous trails. "The 12,000 tourists, who frantically clung to their Yosemite-bound steeds during this period, included many Easterners and Europeans not accustomed to mountain trails." Although this pioneer wagon road possessed an equally precipitous grade in its final descent, the stagecoach provided travelers some degree of comfort and peace of mind and signaled a new era in the history of Yosemite Valley tourism. It is also worthy of note that one of Yosemite's three groves of giant sequoias was discovered when the road was being surveyed. (There is conjecture that is Grove of Big Trees was first seen by members of the Walker expedition of 1833.)

In 1870 the Coulterville and Yosemite Turnpike Company was organized under the General Incorporation Law by citizens of Mariposa County residing on the north side of the Merced River and near Coulterville, to build a wagon road from Bower Cave to the western boundary of the Yosemite Valley Grant. The road was constructed during 1870 and 1871 from Bower Cave up the southern slope of Pilot Peak, to Hazel Green (elevation 5,665), descending to Big Meadow and a short elevation to its terminus at Crane Flat. Here it met its competitor, the Big Oak Flat Road - a Tuolumne County sponsored wagon road that ran an additional 5 miles to Gentrys Station near the top of El Capitan.

The final 13 miles to the valley floor from the Crane Flat terminus, or the 8 miles from Gentrys, were by horseback. Early reports by California State Geologist Josiah Whitney had foretold great difficulty and expense if a wagon road was to descend down the granite walls, and, for a time, this deterred any interested parties from making the attempt.

In 1869 the Yosemite Turnpike Road Company, builders of the Big Oak Flat route, received permission to continue their road on into the valley, on the north side of the river, promising completion by July 1, 1871. Financial difficulties ensued and they received a delay until January 1872. Still nothing was built and at that time Dr. John McLean took over control of the Coulterville and Yosemite Turnpike Company and obtained from the Yosemite Commissioners an exclusion franchise for a toll road into the valley on the north side of the river. The franchise gave exclusion rights the Coulterville Company for a 10-year period so that the road's financiers could coup whatever the construction cost would be. The winter of 1872-1873 was unusually severe and no work ensued so the commissioners extended the contract date to the end of 1874.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Whedon, Hazel. A History of the Roads...of YNP unpublished M.A. thesis, USC, 1934.
Coulterville Road file: Yosemite National Park Research Library
Schlichtmann, Margaret and Irene Paden. The Big Oak Flat Road to Yosemite. YNHA, 1959.
Russell, Carl P. One Hundred Years in Yosemite, rev.ed. YNHA, 1959.
Ditton, Richard Self-guiding Auto Tour of Yosemite National Park: YNN v.35:6, 1956.
Superintendents Annual Reports: Yosemite National Park, 1917.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY N/A

UTM REFERENCES

A 111 248171.5 4118214.52
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
C 111 250000 4118116.52

B 111 252102.5 4118214.52
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
D 111 25215.25 4118031.52

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The UTM references were determined with a rule of 25 feet out from the crown of the road on either side. The road is described in item #7.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

ORGANIZATION Leslie Starr Hart / Historian

DATE

STREET & NUMBER Denver Service Center / National Park Service

8/76

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN 655 Parfet, P.O. Box 25287

(303) 234-4509

STATE

Denver

Co 80225

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES

NO

NONE

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National State Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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Old Coulterville Road and
CONTINUATION SHEET Trail UTM's ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

E 11/255225/4178475
F 11/256435/4178150
G 11/256735/4176825
H 11/256775/4176810
I 11/257575/4176320
J 11/259210/4176510
K 11/260440/4178040
L 11/260755/4177850
M 11/259480/4176500
N 11/257570/4175900
O 11/256940/4175525
P 11/256760/4176550
Q 11/256375/4176850
R 11/256080/4177800
S 11/255215/4178010
T 11/250165/4180325
U 11/249580/4181660
V 11/249580/4182000
W 11/248750/4182000

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 1

After Dr. McLean obtained the franchise, and while work was in progress, the Big Oak Flat Company again applied for permission to enter the valley. It was denied by the Yosemite Commissioners on three occasions - and then granted by the California State Legislature in February 1874.

The Coulterville road was completed on June 18, 1874. It cost \$55,000 for the section from Hazel Green to the valley floor, money supplied by Dr. McLean. The cost was mainly for the expensive detour made to pass through the newly discovered Merced Grove of Big Trees, happened onto while resurveying their route for the Yosemite Commissioners. This "detour" caused the abandonment of 6 miles of the already completed road to Crane Flat. Another expense was the narrow grade from Crane Creek, near Big Meadow, down to the Merced River Canyon floor - a distance of 1150 feet in less than 2 miles, and then the remaining 4 miles up into the valley, all of which had to be blasted out of solid granite.

Big Oak Flat road only required 3 miles of road to be built. A spectacular 3 as they were, however, wrapping around the flank of El Capitan. This latter road was completed to the valley floor one month after the Coulterville road. The feud had been bitter and within a short time it was apparent that the Big Oak Flat was the more popular, and safer, route to the everlasting financial detriment of Dr. John McLean. With two roads in competition the Yosemite Commissioners decided it was unfair to charge tolls inside the Grant and purchased the 4-mile section of the Coulterville Road from the Merced River junction to the Pohono Bridge for \$10,000 and the toll-free 3-mile section of Big Oak Flat from Gentrys for \$3,500.

When Yosemite National Park was established, encompassing the privately owned toll roads, there were no appropriations for purchasing sections on park land. The Government offered to maintain the roads if the companies would declare them toll-free. The Big Oak Flat accepted and the Coulterville Road Company refused. The road rapidly fell into a state of comparative disuse with accompanying disrepair. The Board of Supervisors declared the section from Hazel Green to the Pohono Bridge a public highway in 1911 and a complicated lawsuit ensued with Mary McLean, daughter of Dr. McLean, demanding the right to collect tolls. This eventually involved the National Park Service in 1917. Her rights were denied because no maintenance had been done since 1908.

Today the precipitous grade is closed to vehicle use. The partially paved section in the Foresta/Big Meadow area is used primarily by residents, and the section through the Merced Grove of Big Trees is only driven on as a "fire road."